

Chapter 7: Discourses of Culture

This is the first of two chapters which focus on the bottom right of the grammar, in the **statements about culture** domain. Whereas grand narratives, in Chapter 6, are part of the driving force for how we construct culture within **global positioning and politics**, discourses are under the heading of **particular cultural products**. This chapter therefore explores discourses of culture as things that we construct in order to make sense of culture, but which then take on a life of their own and can easily begin to dominate what we think is real about culture.

Discourses

Discourses which are specialised ways of talking and writing that belong to particular groups, such as technical, professional, academic and political discourses, can be a powerful means of establishing ideas and forms of behaviour. They draw people in to the thinking which underpins them. In this sense, discourses are a central part of **small culture formation**, and are at the core of reification, as described and defined in Chapter 4. We all have experience of being influenced by discourses in everyday life. Discourses also have a role in Self and Other politics in that they can create a specialist language which alienates outsiders and strengthens the prestige of insiders. Indeed, we most easily recognise discourses when we are outsiders to them. They relate to how **statements about culture** can easily become packaged in such a way that they are reified and become considered the ‘truth’ about how things are. Looking at discourses about culture will therefore enable an evaluation of major concepts which have entered our everyday thinking about culture in terms of how far they promote or inhibit our understanding.

I think we can all recall a time when we found ourselves with a group of people from a particular professional, sports, technical or other interest group, where, although they were speaking our larger language, we could not understand what they were talking about and felt excluded because they were using technical terms, ‘in’-words or phrases, or references to things that are only shared by the group who normally use the discourse. The discourse might not even be esoteric in this way, but be a way of talking about something which is infectious and draws people in – something like this:

1. A group of people is joined by a new member who has an endearing personality and who uses particularly racist expressions about foreigners.
2. The group at first are unhappy about his attitude; but they do not want to reject him because they like his overall presence.
3. The newcomer also has an opinion about political correctness which resonates with the group – that there is a virtue in speaking one’s mind and saying things as they are, and that there is no harm in a bit of banter and teasing.
4. Over time this attitude catches on in the group and they begin to use his language.

The implication here is that something like racism, or sexism, can be carried and transmitted by their discourses, and that people can become racist or sexist by becoming users of these

particular ways of talking. The concept of neo-racism has been referred to in several places in this book, to be looked at in detail in Chapter 9; but it is important to say here that it can reside between the lines of everyday talk in this way, even where people who use the discourse are unaware.

Gains, losses and power

Discourses can therefore certainly be strategically deployed for the purpose of influencing, changing or controlling behaviour. An example of this is the narrative about changing institutional behaviour in Chapter 4. ‘Smart Project Management’ was introduced by the management of an organisation in such a way that the phrase became commonly used in a wide range of everyday institutional events and influenced a change in behaviour. This is a recent observation from my own experience:

In order to improve the ratings of the university in a time of financial crisis, the management launched a new concept – ‘students as partners in learning and teaching’. This was a conscious break from a previous concept – ‘students as customers’ – which was not considered sufficiently in tune with the intrinsic value of education. The launch of the new concept was accompanied by concerns that the university was under-performing in the national survey of student satisfaction, especially in the area of students recognising and appreciating how far their evaluations were being addressed. There followed the launch of a campaign to increase student awareness. Individual departments responded with leaflets to be distributed among students, with the slogan, ‘you say, we do’. In the new strategic plan, much was said about the university’s ‘values’, within which ‘partnership’ was a recurring term, as it was within reports and department meetings.

Part of the context of this introduction of a new discourse is the placing of ‘learning’ before ‘teaching’, to place the student first, the previous term having been ‘teaching and learning’. A member of the university is ‘on message’ when they are explicitly aware of the discourse and can reproduce it in public meetings and networking. This is also a major mechanism of neoliberalism, as referred to in Chapter 5, where constructing headings, buzzwords, strap-lines, or the like can give the right impression to external audiences without actually changing the substance of what is done. It is therefore a linguistic sham for the sake of appearances, with nothing to be gained but power through empty reputation.

In a more domestic domain is the example of ‘baby-led’ weaning, referred to in the Abi-Tomas narrative in Chapter 4. It is significant because of the relative newness of the term, promoted by the original research of Rapley & Murkett (2008). The phrase refers to a procedure for feeding babies in the months following weaning in which they can help themselves to accessible items of food which are spread out in front of them instead of being spoon-fed.

One of many websites on the topic¹ presents a text which combines a useful acronym and reference to a medical authority:

Baby-led weaning
 Approved by the BabyCentre Medical Advisory Board
 Sponsored by Heinz
 What is baby-led weaning?
 How do I get BLW started?
 What are the benefits of BLW?
 Are there any down sides to BLW?
 Won't my baby choke if we try BLW?
 Is BLW suitable for breastfed and formula-fed babies?
 Are there any reasons why I shouldn't try BLW?
 Where can I find out more?

The hyperlink on 'Heinz' leads to the food company site on the same topic, with the text, 'We know that many mums are interested in baby led weaning but what is it and should you give it a try with your baby?' There are also books, magazine articles, scientific reports, and expensive yet practical plastic cloths, to spread out in front of the baby, on which the small items of food will be spread. Altogether, this phenomenon might be called a technology because of the precise science, technique and terminology which it involves.

In both of the case of 'partners in learning and teaching' and baby-led weaning there is an element of control and manipulation in that the views of the people concerned are being influenced and indeed formed by the adoption of language which is both seductive and convenient. However, at the same time, there are clear benefits. The following table expresses these gains and losses, and shows that, the losses concern some lack of recognition resulting from the way in which the discourses impose a particular reality. There are however gains in identity and certainty, even in the case of the neoliberal university strategy, despite the emptiness referred to above.

Discourse & promoters	Participants gain	Participants & others lose
'Partners in learning and teaching' Promoted by university management, to improve the ratings of the university.	Employees gaining morale and keeping their jobs. Very likely an improved educational experience for students and teachers.	University employees and students lose some recognition that they were already in partnership. Possible loss of recognition for other practices.

¹ These websites of course keep changing, so that readers might not find exactly the language referred to in my text. At the time of writing the first edition, this is the site referred to: <http://www.babycentre.co.uk/baby/startingsolids/babyledwneaning/>. While the site is still there when writing the second edition, I made the decision not to change my examples because the overall point being made is the same.

'Baby-led weaning' promoted by companies who sell related products such as food items and plastic sheets for spreading food items, the media and authors.	Parents getting guidance and certainty of direction. Very likely an improved experience for babies and parents.	Possible loss of more traditional practices and resulting conflicts.
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The final column implies that the discourse takes on a 'dominant' role in determining what is important – hence giving rise to the notion of dominant discourse, as a powerful way of looking at things which marginalises competing ways of looking at things.

The power possessed by discourses to impose a particular reality gives them a central role in acts of chauvinism such as sexism and racism. Sustained negative constructions of a foreign or different Other require a particular language to support them. This language can be so powerful that it draws members in and becomes normalised behaviour.

Reflection

In terms of gains and losses, it might be helpful here to use the table or a variation of it to plot an institutional or domestic discourse we are involved with. The final column in particular needs to be evaluated. We might recall cases where we feel we have become victim to a dominant discourse. What was the nature of the discourse? Were we able to resist it? If so, how? If not, why not? Was the dominant discourse created by a particular group for this purpose, or did it take on a life of its own and become out of control?

In terms of being drawn into a discourse, we might recall a time when we found ourselves with a group of people who spoke about a particular topic, such as gender, race, age, disability, migration, or a particular grand narrative, in such a powerful, even though distasteful way that we had no choice but:

- to take part in their way of speaking about the topic, and conform to how they depicted it
- to keep quiet and withdraw, or
- to resist and become unpopular.

How easy or difficult was it to resist the power of this dominant discourse and the temptation to conform? We might then consider instances when we have heard people say 'I don't like this way of talking'. What were the circumstances and outcomes?

Agency and control

Considering what has been said about the power of discourses to change and control the ways in which we look at things, the following questions about have often been raised in academic literature:

- Are we totally controlled by one discourse or another?
- Are we able to dialogue with and influence discourses?
- Can we stand outside discourses?

- If individuals are able to influence, change or make discourses, must it be from the position of another discourse?

These questions concern the nature of social construction, and how we answer them can be aligned to one of two ways of looking at social construction:

- If we feel that everything and everyone are determined by discourses, we might be aligned by social constructionism.
- If we feel that we can stand outside discourses and see the true nature of the realities which they attempt to construct, we might be aligned to social constructivism.

This book tends towards the latter in that it maintains that there is a truth about the nature of culture which is often blurred by powerful discourses in the academy and in everyday life.

Discourses as social constructions

It needs to be remembered throughout this chapter and the book as a whole that discourses *are* social constructions – fictional labels for what are in fact fluid social phenomena which do not have hard, real boundaries or territories. Discourses are not really real things at all, but convenient labels for kinds of things. I have already used, at various points throughout the book, a number of names for discourses. I named four discourses of culture: the essentialist discourse, the critical cosmopolitan discourse and the ‘West versus the rest’ discourse, in Chapter 3, and the West as steward discourse in Chapter 5. It must never be forgotten that these are simply such conveniences. If one says that such and such discourses do or do not exist, it means that there is or there is not sufficient experience of that ‘kind of thing’ to make it worth noting and talking about. The term, ‘discourse’, is an imposition, itself part of a particular discourse for describing society. In effect, as small cultures, categorising and describing them is an act of stereotyping and can fall into an essentialist trap.

We therefore need to be very careful. On the other hand, if we think of discourses as social forces rather than places, which can move, change, grow, shrink, and incorporate and be incorporated by others, a non-essentialist view, as encouraged for ‘culture’, may be approached. In this sense, these discourses of culture are rather like grand narratives except that they may be less long-standing, particular to groups rather than nations, and generally smaller. They will however contribute to these narratives, though not in a one-to-one manner. Indeed, because the most powerful grand narratives tend themselves to be ideologically marked, wherever they are located they might well be supported by the essentialist discourse described below.

Agency or control

Here, we might consider the various discourses which govern aspects of our lives, and to what degree we are really controlled by them. How much agency do we have to change, resist or respond creatively to them? How far are we able to contribute to their formation? What are the factors which govern the degrees of agency or control which you possess?

Ramla, Ed and Jonathan: sticking to principles

The following narrative² indicates a particular complexity in the deployment and use of discourses of and about culture in the **statements about culture** domain. Looking at this exchange in terms of discourses may serve to explain something of what is going on.

Ramla was taking part in an international project to develop a set of documents and guidelines for inducting new employees. There were new colleagues from a range of countries; and she felt it was a massive opportunity to be able to get together in this way and learn about new cultures. There were however a number of issues which were raising their heads, which she was finding quite hard to negotiate. The project leader was from a particular country which had for a long time been the most influential in the organisation. It was supposed to be fully international, but in effect, she and a number of her colleagues from the South, as they labelled themselves, felt that they had often been side-lined when it came to promotions and opportunities. Now they were making the most of this opportunity to have their voices heard.

The issue of culture was very much on the agenda. At least Ramla was making sure that it was – to ensure a true inclusivity for people from diverse backgrounds. That morning they had spent several hours on a particular phrase, which was to do with being direct in expressing ones' opinions to line managers. Ramla argued that this was not an acceptable norm in her own culture and in a number of other cultures with which she was familiar. This had resulted in a deadlock. Those who disagreed with Ramla maintained that the clause was important because it represented a sense of equality in the organisation which was the only way forward to encourage a diversity of backgrounds and interests, and also to ensure efficiency in communication. Ramla had caused a bit of a stir when she suggested that this was a particularly Western point of view and would alienate a lot of people who just did not feel comfortable being so direct.

When Ramla met with her friend Ed later, and told him about this, he said that she was going too far, and that he didn't think that the proposed clause was Western at all. Jonathan, who was sitting with them in the canteen, was interested to know that Ramla and Ed came from the same country and wanted to know why they had different views. Ramla pointed out that their society was very complex, of course – this didn't even need to be pointed out – and that Ed was right to make her remember that, yes, not everyone had problems with being direct. Indeed, many of her countrypeople were well-known for their

² This narrative is based on numerous comments from colleagues and acquaintances on cultural issues with institutional language, observation of the language of nurses with elderly patients in hospitals, research projects which have indicated that people interviewed display multiple and sometimes conflicting discourses (Amadasi & Holliday 2017a; 2017b; Armenta & Holliday 2015; Oral 2015) and that organisations use references to cultural difference to frame performance preferences (Angouri & Glynos 2009).

directness. So, then, Ed wanted to know why she was pushing it so much. He felt that it was really something that was important for their parents' generation, and that anyway it depended on what sort of family you came from, and, in the workplace, what sort of place it was, whether in the private or public sector, and that sort of thing. Ramla replied that sometimes you just had to make a stand. She knew that there were plenty of examples in their society of what she was complaining about, but that this wasn't really their culture. Being direct was very often just considered to be rude. She then went on to talk about how basic expressions of politeness in their language were being lost as a result of this cultural loss. Ed replied that the language changed, and that you only had to read their literature of the last century to see how different it was then to what she was talking about.

Jonathan joined in, and said he knew what they were talking about. Where he came from, really nobody worried too much about people being direct anymore. All this business of beating about the bush, having to say 'no' three times before accepting an offer, was considered very out of date. Yes, there were some very traditional expressions that went with all of that, which no one used any more, which was sad in a way; but nowadays people just didn't have time for them. He said that he did, nevertheless, find it very disturbing when very young nurses spoke so directly to his 86-year-old father when he was in hospital. He therefore shared some of their anxieties, even though he felt he was probably 'Western'. He said that he didn't mind at all being direct; but he really didn't think it was something that needed to be pushed as part of the company ethos about 'equality', which everyone knew didn't really exist anyway. Also, he had heard that Ramla had been very 'direct' in the meetings she was talking about.

Subscribing to conflicting discourses

What is of particular interest in this narrative is Ramla's apparent subscription to several different discourses of culture at the same time, which makes her appear to be contradicting herself. In her **statements about culture**, on the one hand, she implies:

'In our culture, we are not direct in the way we speak to each other. Being expected to be direct results in the loss of expressions of politeness in our language.'

This is framed with the assertion that 'we are non-Western' as active resistance, in **global positioning and politics** to perceived expectations in her workplace. These statements are in alignment with the *essentialist* and '*West versus the rest*' discourses of culture. However, she also expresses a very different **statement about culture** which implies:

'Our society is complex. Not everyone has problems with being direct. We are well-known for being direct.'

Here she subscribes to the *critical cosmopolitan* discourse of culture in which there can be a creative crossing of cultural boundaries. In this contradiction, Ramla draws on different **cultural resources**: the tradition of not being direct in her country on the one hand, supported by experience of being marginalised at work, and then, on the other hand, knowledge that there are also direct people in her country.

Ramla's move from essentialist to critical cosmopolitan discourses is influenced by discussion with Ed and Jonathan. Ed, who shares her cultural background, provides a very different **statement about culture**:

‘It is not particularly Western to be direct. Not being direct belongs more to the older generation. Language changes.’

He draws on a different **cultural resource** to Ramla: experience of complex relationships with directness. In **global positioning and politics**, he does not perceive a conflict with the West. Jonathan, who observes these differences between two colleagues who come from the same cultural background, then provides a **statement about culture** that expresses similar complexity:

‘Where I come from people are no longer worried about being direct, even if there is a loss of traditional language. Being too direct is only inappropriate for the older generation.’

He appears very much on the same page as Ed, except that Jonathan also states that he is ‘probably Western’ and therefore confuses the possibility of a ‘West versus the rest’ discourse of culture. He also notes that Ramla is herself known for being very direct when speaking in meetings.

The reason for the conflict in Ramla’s position can be captured in the following points:

- Ramla has experience of her cultural background being marginalised by what she considers to be Western cultural norms. She therefore subscribes to the ‘West versus the rest’ discourse.
- To counter this Western view, she needs to emphasise her own cultural norms by employing the essentialist discourse.
- This is in fact in conflict with her everyday experience of her own cultural background to the extent that she is also able, when not explicitly resisting the Western views, to employ the ‘critical cosmopolitan’ discourse. This does not however sufficiently serve her anti-West resistance agenda; so, she returns to the essentialist discourse.

Projecting strong essentialist statements about one’s imagination of one’s ‘culture’ in this way, even when they do not correspond with the complexities of everyday reality, is a common phenomenon. There may be a variety of reasons for people to do this. The following is a working list which may be developed further:

- They subscribe wholly to the essentialist discourse and believe that traits and values which do not conform to it are exceptions.

- They are in circumstances which require them to make special efforts to present who they are by exaggerating.
- They are being asked to make quick responses to leading questions about their 'culture', and have not thought about it too much.

The last case could be a researcher presenting them with a ready-made theory of culture which they find convenient to go along with. It needs to be remembered here that a lot of people may not have thought too much about cultural identity before.

One might equally wonder why people listening to these statements take them at face value, when they should know from their own life experience that cultural realities are more complex. The following is another working list of possible reasons:

- They are seduced by the easy answers of the essentialist discourse.
- These are after all statements that are made by insiders to 'the culture' who ought to know.
- They are caught up in Othering the group concerned, the process of which is supported by the resulting stereotype.
- They are under pressure to make quick sense as newcomers.
- They are attracted by exotic realities.
- They are carrying out research based on the theories which are associated with the essentialist discourse.

Regarding the second point, note Jonathan's confusion in the narrative when two people 'from the same culture' give him very different accounts of what 'it' is like. Regarding the final point, a major error in the academic domain of the essentialist discourse is that marked statements will appear as objective and scientific descriptions, when in effect they may be different types of responses to the pressures of interviews.

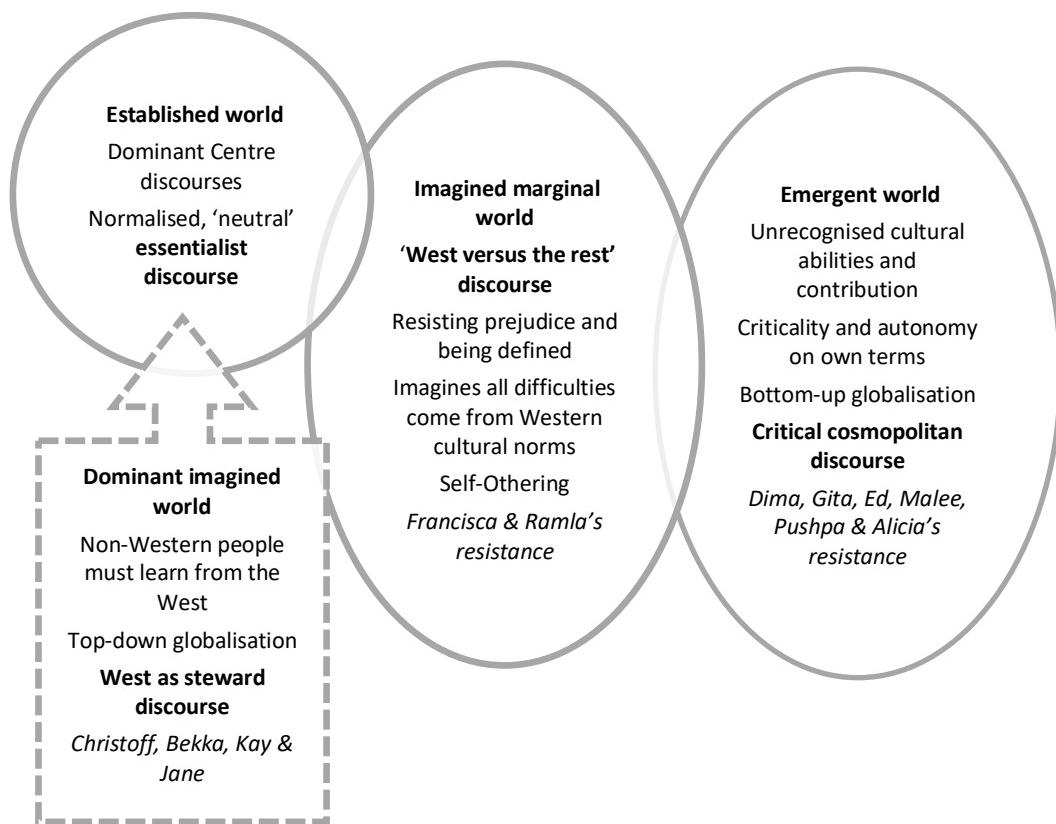
It would be easy to come away from this narrative with the impression that Ramla is simply more conservative and less critical than her compatriot, Ed. I disagree with this. It is important to here to look at the **underlying universal cultural processes** that the two characters are engaged with. Ramla is making sense of *cultural relations within her organisation*. She is taking action to manage marginalised cultural relationships that she sees there. Ed, in contrast, is making sense of *the way in which a friend* is taking action to manage cultural relations within her workplace. He is therefore less politically engaged than she is, at least in what we see in this narrative. We must not judge on the basis of a particular slice of cultural statement and action. Ramla is being highly critical of the organisation; and it may well be that, in its neoliberal posturing, the organisation is claiming monopoly of being direct as though it is a Western construct. *However*, rather than opposing this with what amounts to a self-Othering 'West versus the rest' discourse, Ramla could be more effective in her opposition if she were to break the organisation's monopoly by claiming being direct for the non-West.

Reflection

We might benefit from trying to identify with Ramla's position rather than just dismissing her as essentialist. We might do this by recalling instances when we have made exaggerated, marked statements about 'our culture', and rationalising what our reasons were for doing this. We might also recall instances when we have taken other people's statements about 'their culture' at face value. What was our agenda for doing this? What did we have to gain from going along with such easy answers? Can we then begin to understand why people might appear to be Self-Othering? Is it then possible to edit and add to the above lists of reasons for subscribing to or being taken in by the essentialist discourse?

Competing worlds

The different and indeed competing discoursal positions evident in the Ramla-Ed-Jonathan narrative can be expressed in terms of competing worlds of understanding. These are represented in the following figure³.



The *established world* is what has been most dominant in how many of us have been brought up to think of cultural difference between this or that large culture. It is fed by and feeds grand narratives that position nations against each other within the **global positioning and politics** domain. However, the established world does not recognise the ideological

³ The figure is adapted from Holliday (2011: 188), and a further adaption in Holliday (2016: 31). As with the grammar of culture, I find that I can adjust the details within each sphere to meet the particular discussion that I am involved in at the time.

nature of grand narratives. It is a positivist world in which the everyday power of such grand narratives has achieved normal and neutral status, as has its dominant *essentialist discourse*. The people who inhabit this world may well be aware of ideology and the nature of discourses, and of the postmodern revolution that discredits grand narratives and essentialism; but they think such critiques are exaggerated and that all one needs to be is careful and considerate. This is where soft, or neo-essentialism and neo-racism reside, in a world where people are careful not to be essentialist or racist. The falseness of the default preference for national categories in methodological nationalism, referred to in Chapter 3, goes unnoticed.

The residents of the established world are therefore likely to be unaware of the *dominant imagined* world that underpins their established world. The degree of this unawareness will depend on how far they subscribe to the essentialist discourse – by Christoff (less so) and Bekka and Jane (more so) – or of the *West as steward discourse* that in fact influences their thinking and behaviour. The West as steward discourse itself contains a considerable amount of critical well-wishing that clouds, and then in effect strengthens its distortion. The feminism that Stefan imagines Jane subscribes to, and of which Alicia is so critical, falls into this category, as does Kay's development role, both in Chapter 6. This imagined dominant world is therefore the place where those who are caught within it try unsuccessfully to make sense of **global positioning and politics**, very probably without knowing that they are in it at all.

Another very dominant sense-making is in the *imagined marginal* world. This is the location of Ramla's resistance – where she opposes the essentialist discourse of culture in the established world with its equally essentialist, mirror image '*West versus the rest*' discourse. These two discourses and the worlds they inhabit, ironically, feed each other in that they are based upon oppositional stereotypes, each of which justifies the other. The '*West versus the rest*' discourse is in fact a type of essentialist discourse. Also, the claims made by the '*West versus the rest*' discourse, that there are things, such as directness and individualism, imposed by the West that are inappropriate for the non-West, provide the West as steward discourse with its well-wishing, liberationist agenda – 'we can help you to be direct and individualist' (as Bekka says to Jenna in Chapter 5). This outcome is of course perceived to be deeply patronising. The '*West versus the rest*' discourse does not want to be liberated – 'we do not, and do not want to in our culture'. This opposition does however result in a Self-Othering denial. There is similar resistance from Francisca in Chapter 3, where she agrees with a methodology that emphasises essentialist cultural descriptions and maintains the position that 'emphasising different cultures with different characteristics protects us from having to behave like Americans and British'.

It is the *emergent world* where, in the view of this book, the more authentic sense-making takes place. It is however an uphill struggle for the characters listed in this part of the figure to make themselves heard. Their *critical cosmopolitan discourse* is complex and does not accept any of the established large culture tenets of the other worlds. In several of the narratives where these characters appear, they are the people who are looking in from another place, always commenting that things are not as they appear to be (Ed, in the previous narrative, Malee in Chapter 5, and Alicia in the last chapter). Dima, in Chapter 2, resists by defending the right to use Facebook, claiming bottom-up globalisation by positioning herself

as ‘we are able to claim Western cultural practices and make them our own on our own terms’. Gita disagrees with a methodology that emphasises essentialist cultural descriptions in Chapter 3, positioning herself as, ‘these cultural theories are invented by the Centre and discriminate against the Periphery in the same way as racist and sexist descriptions’.

Reflection

The competing worlds figure needs to be looked at again and related to all the reconstructed ethnographic narratives throughout the book. It needs to be remembered that individuals may employ more than one discourse at once and at different times, and, in so doing, inhabit more than one of the competing worlds at once – just as we can all employ the splinters of competing grand and personal narratives, as discussed in the previous chapter. It is then useful for each of us to locate events in our own experiences in the figure. Because the worlds and discourses are no more than operational definitions, we might also assess the labelling in the figure and find possible alternatives. Is it the case that the whole depiction is a product of the critical cosmopolitan discourse? Is it possible to draw a similar but different set of relationships from the point of view of, for example, the ‘West versus the rest’ discourse? Is it possible to talk about the discourses neutrally, without being influenced by a particular discourse?

The terms, ‘normalised’ and ‘neutral’ are used in the figure as characterising the established world. There are connections between these terms and ‘reification’, ‘naturalisation’, ‘routinisation’ and ‘institutionalisation’ that are used in other places in the book. It is often hard to distinguish between them; but readers may benefit from searching out their uses and thinking about their respective connotations. Is it that case that all of them have something to do with the potential controlling aspects of discourses. The examples in Chapter 4 will be useful here. Top-down and bottom-up globalisation are referred to in the figure. Again, with reference to particular reconstructed ethnographic narratives, what is the relevance here? The first references to these are in Chapter 2.

Nada, Jahan and Osama: getting it wrong?

The discussion so far in this chapter gives the impression that it must be very hard for onlookers to know what to believe and what not to believe. Various discourses may be constructed for the purpose of diverse agendas; but they are always real for the people who employ them at their particular moments in time. The following narrative⁴ addresses this issue:

Nada had to write an essay about cultural identity for her coursework. It had to be based on an interview with someone from a different cultural background to her own. She chose to interview Jahan because he was the most foreign

⁴ This narrative is based on the experience of students talking and writing about each other’s cultural realities, and of a number of discussions following conference and other presentations.

person in her group, at least from her point of view, and he always seemed pleasant and friendly. She thought it would be an opportunity to get to know him better.

In a session to help them prepare for the interviews, their tutor said that they should avoid using the word 'culture' altogether because he said this would make the questions too 'leading' and take everyone off on predictable paths. Nada really couldn't understand this. If they were supposed to be talking about culture, why couldn't they just name it? She really believed that people would simply talk about what they believed, and that it was false and even patronising to use 'special devices' to make them talk in particular ways.

During the interview, she found Jahan warm and expressive. He had a lot to say; and she didn't have to work hard at all to keep it going. One or two of her other classmates had told her that they had found it really difficult to keep the interview from drying up.

He began by saying that he was pleased that they were meeting in a public place because it was actually against his culture to mix with women outside his family. He went on to describe how difficult it was for people who came from his country to work in pairs in the classroom with people from the opposite sex and be expected to talk about quite personal things sometimes. He explained that talking to her was different because she was a professional woman who had introduced herself to him formally about the interview.

Nada was very impressed with Jahan for being prepared to stick to his cultural values in this way. She felt he had principles and traditions which she was afraid were not being taken seriously in the international setting of their programme.

When she came to write the assignment, she found some recent research which confirmed what Jahan had told her about his culture. Moreover, some of this literature explained why his culture and others like it were not compatible with the culture in which their programme was taking place. She had also read about Othering and argued in her assignment that the aims and values of the programme they were on were Othering Jahan's culture by failing to recognise the cultural incompatibility and forcing people like him into inappropriate behaviour.

When Nada got a low grade for her assignment, with the comment that she was in effect Othering Jahan and his culture, and that she was not being sufficiently critical of the literature, she really couldn't understand where to turn. Her first reaction was to think that the person who marked it was being so insensitive about people like Jahan other cultures generally – that he just couldn't see beyond his own cultural values, and actually proved the point that she was making in her assignment. She didn't however anticipate what happened next.

She was talking about the issue with a group of people when her friend, Osama, got quite angry and said that Nada was being really ignorant in taking

people like Jahan seriously. Osama said that if Nada had heard that sort of thing from someone in her own so-called ‘culture’ she would have rejected him immediately for being sexist.

Osama did come from the same region that Jahan did; but Nada wondered if she really knew his culture. Jahan went on to say that Nada was being very naïve and needed to know that, just like everywhere else in the world, there were lots of political issues. She said that the problem with people like Jahan was that they claimed that they represented their entire society, whereas in fact they represented a particular religious group.

Osama said that Nada’s tutor was right in saying that they needed to be more critical of the literature, much of which was only interested in confirming stereotypes. On the other hand, it was Jahan who was Othering himself by claiming that his entire society is confined within a narrow stereotype. Osama was also angry because people like Nada just jumped at every opportunity to find some exotic cultural practice to protect. Moreover, he wasn’t entirely convinced that her tutor’s liberal attitude wasn’t also part of some sort of cultural superiority, to say how people should or should not talk about other people’s cultural backgrounds.

The table below attempts to make sense of the complex conflicts evident in this narrative. An overriding implication in the analysis is that Nada’s programme and her tutor are Western, whereas Jahan and Osama are not Western. This is not stated in the narrative, and how far the issues are to do with Western and non-Western positions is always anyway a matter of debate. The implication is nevertheless there.

Jahan	Nada	Osama	Programme tutor
Statements about culture ‘My culture has practices and values that are incompatible with those of the programme’	‘I agree with Jahan that his culture has practices and values which are incompatible with those of our programme’	‘People like Jahan claim wrongly that they represent their entire society when in fact they are making sexist statements. They are Othering themselves by subscribing to a limiting stereotype’	‘Using the term, “culture”, leads to essentialism. We should be critical of what is claimed by the literature’
Discourses ‘West versus the rest’ Essentialist	Essentialist (According to Osama) West as steward	Critical cosmopolitan ‘West versus the rest’	Critical cosmopolitan (According to Osama) West as steward
Global positioning & politics Being Othered by the West	Guilt of distrust of the West	Being Othered by the West because of self-Othering	

Cultural resources			
The cultural practice of gender segregation	Established positivist essentialist literature	Knowledge that gender segregation is only carried out by some people	Knowledge that language can influence thought. New non-essentialist literature

It is again evident, in the table, that an individual can not only employ more than one and also contradictory discourses, as noted with Ramla earlier in the chapter, but also that people on different sides of an argument can employ the same discourses as each other. Hence, although Osama is so angry about Jahan's point of view, they both share the 'West versus the rest' discourse; but Osama feels that employing a critical cosmopolitan discourse is a better way of countering Western Othering, than employing an essentialist discourse. The implication here is that discourses can be coupled with different other discourses. At another time, in other circumstances, when perhaps being anti-Western is the major concern, Osama and Jahan could indeed find themselves on the same side of the argument.

Osama's ambivalence towards Nada's tutor's comments arises from his suspicion that, despite their disagreement with each other, both Nada and her tutor subscribe to the West as steward discourse, in which they assume a role in caring for the cultural well-being of the non-Western Other. This in a sense indicates a no-win situation for a well-wishing tutor who just wants to counter essentialist Othering, but perhaps misses the point that it might not be his responsibility to decide how people should or should not speak about culture. This tutor would however certainly feel that he was on the same side as Osama. This involves a political correctness strategy through which it is thought that a discourse can be undone by changing key aspects of its language. More shall be said about this strategy below. Here it is necessary to note that the strategy is met with suspicion by Osama, who feels that it is presumptuous and patronising for the tutor to think that she can defend his (Osama's) point of view.

The objectivist myth

A possible heading for the above table might be 'Who is right?'. The narrative reveals that it is very hard to arrive at a straight forward conclusion about what Jahan has to say and about what Osama has to say about him. Not only is it difficult for Nada to assess what she is hearing from Jahan, but it is also very hard for her to recognise the discursal aspects of what she has read in the literature.

The essentialist discourse is seductive not only because it claims logical and systematic insider knowledge, but also because it is present in an academic literature which claims objective knowledge. This is indicated in the **cultural resources** row. Moreover, by claiming objective knowledge, this academic literature does not acknowledge that it is making statements which are themselves socially and politically constructed within their own small cultures of knowledge which define how they think and operate. This process is described by Kuhn's revolutionary (1970) *The structure of scientific revolutions*. It can be argued that groups of academics get into **small culture formation** with respect to the construction and reification of ideas, to give an outward impression of objective professionalism. What

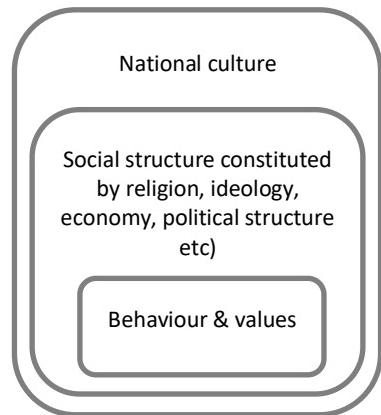
academic literature says about culture can therefore also be considered to represent discourses of and about culture within the **statements about culture** domain of the grammar.

Reflection

The complex picture of positioning through discourses can be explored further in our own experience. We might recall the detail of our discussions or arguments with other people concerning issues of culture and identity and try to reconstruct which discourses we employed. How many discourses were involved, and did they contradict each other? In what ways does this mean that we present ourselves in different ways to different people at different times? When we do, does this mean that (a) we are undecided, that (b) we have a strategy to present different views to different people, or that (c) there really is more than one way of looking at things, and even different truths? We can then direct our attention to the other people who took part and try to assess how far it is the case that people who employ conflicting discourses are (i) liars, (ii) unable to decide who they are, or (iii) struggling to deal with complex realities.

The essentialist discourse in ‘science’

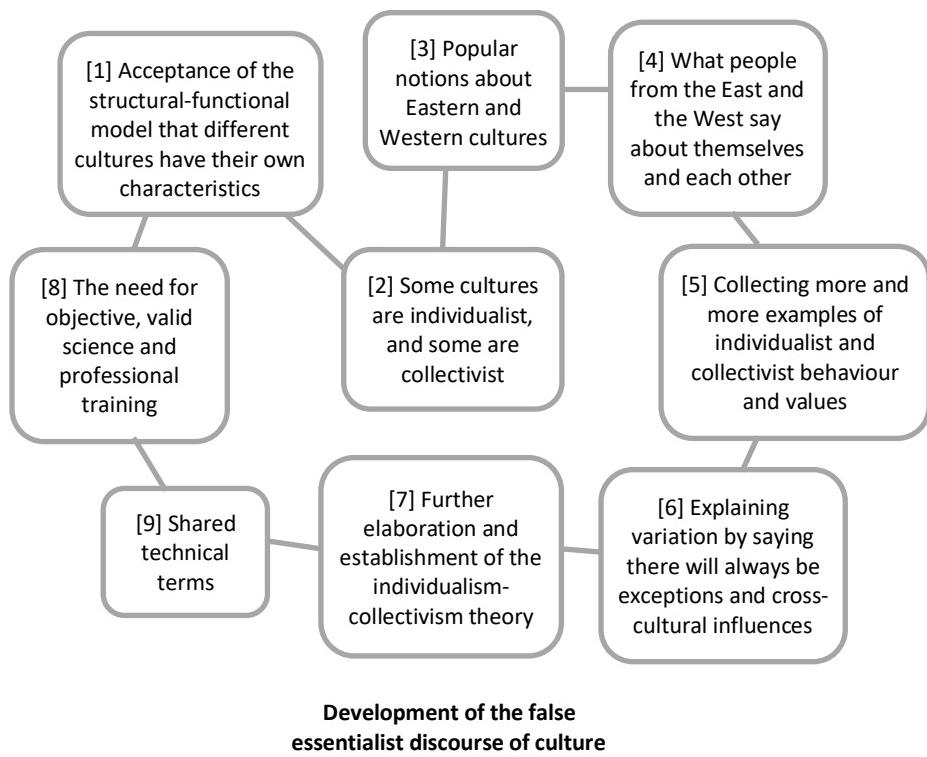
A major **cultural resource** that Nada draws upon in the narrative is dominant positivist essentialist literature. It is hard for her to evaluate this literature, and to see its essentialism, as a novice student researcher. For established academics also, this literature is highly seductive because it satisfies the desire for objectivity and neutrality of so-called science that is at the root of the essentialist discourse of culture. It can be traced to what many have called as structural-functional model of society which is depicted in the figure. This in turn can be traced back to the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). That he was a biologist by training is implicit in the organicistic nature of the model. Its success has to do with its straight forward nature. It is far easier to understand than the grammar of culture presented in this book, which is based on the alternative, social action model of German sociologist, Max Weber (1864-1920). The structural-functional model presents national culture as neatly containing all other aspects of society within it, which in turn contain behaviour and values. This means that behaviour and values are (a) explainable and predictable by the characteristics of the national culture and (b) essentially different to behaviour and values in another national culture.



False structural-functional model of culture

This picture of culture lends itself well to a positivist scientific enterprise with a promise of explanation and prediction. An example of how the essentialist discourse is built around this promise, in the case of individualism and collectivism, is plotted in the second figure, below. The depiction in the figure is of course from the point of view of the critical cosmopolitan discourse. The apparently ‘scientific’ theoretical premises in bubbles 1 and 2 are influenced by popular notions in 3 about a West-rest divide and a naïve, surface reading of

statements about culture in 4. The positivist quest of finding examples to support the theory is in 5 and 7, with a convenient dispatching of exceptions in 6. The technical terms which grow out of science in 9 provides the language to bind the discourse. 8 represents the driving force of the discourse, in which academics can build their careers on developing the intricacies of theory, and professionals the reliable training. It is important however to emphasise that arrangement of social life and the process depicted in the two figures are essentially false. They both represent a simplification and distortion of the nature of culture that denies the complex possibilities for social action upon which arguments in this book rest. I need to say this yet again to head off the possibility of novice researchers like Nada citing these figures as viable images of culture.



Nada, Osama, Theobald and Jahan: 'shall we share our cultures?'

More complexity regarding discourses of culture emerges in the following continuation of the narrative⁵ about Nada, Osama and Jahan:

Nada found Osama's attitude very difficult to understand; and she felt quite offended at being accused of being patronising. In her experience, all the students were looking for opportunities for their cultures to be recognised and understood if only a little. It seemed to her that they were delighted, on international evenings, to bring their national food, sing their national songs, and

⁵ The development of the second part of this narrative draws from research carried out on home university student attitudes to international students (Montgomery 2010), and numerous conversations with newcomers and long-standing immigrants, and an interview with a British person about attitudes to foreigners.

sometimes even display dancing and costumes. When there were national festivals, the organisers of the evenings distributed leaflets and sometimes organised special displays on the campus.

Jahan was one of the people who took part in these events; and he complained that in the university where he was previously there had been no such provision. Nada herself sometimes brought dishes that she felt belonged to her own cultural heritage. Her grandparents on both sides had migrated there when her parents were children. Being labelled ‘Western’ by implication by Osama also bothered her. She hadn’t thought of herself in that way before.

What Nada found particularly meaningful from her programme was the notion of a ‘third space’. This was a different tutor to the one who had set the assignment and banned the mention of ‘culture’. The third space idea, as far as she could work it out, acknowledged cultural difference and that people had different values that might not always be compatible, but that they could meet and understand each other in some sort of intermediary place in which they could be themselves as well as getting on with other people. It seemed to her that that international evenings were all about – as long as home students also went to them. She knew however that that was often not the case. She also wondered if her interviewing Jahan was a third space activity.

Nada dreaded meeting Osama again. When she did, it wasn’t good at all. He did however appeal to Nada’s own cultural background when he said, ‘You yourself must surely appreciate that we are all more than traditional food, songs, clothes and festivals’. Osama said that the best that these international evenings could do was to encourage people to withdraw into exaggerations of who they were and become some sort of exotic spectacle for those home students who did turn up. What was most alarming to Nada was that another student, Theobald, was there, who had actually been one of the organisers of the evenings. He started saying that Nada probably didn’t realise how so many of ‘them’ just put up with representing themselves with food and costumes because they had nowhere else to turn. He said that very few people would actually come out and say this because it was even more demeaning to admit it.

Nada then began to think that everyone was just clutching at straws⁶. She recalled how many of the home students said that the reasons why they didn’t mix with international student was because they were so frightened to offend them. One of her friends had told her that he didn’t dare talk about what he ate bacon for breakfast in case it offended someone’s religion. He then said that really all this talk of culture was only relevant anyway to foreigners. When she told Osama this, the response was that how patronising it was to imagine that

⁶ ‘Clutching at straws’ means turning to even hopeless solutions out of desperation.

people everywhere couldn't deal with diversity. He said that everyone came from societies which were sufficiently complex for them to have grown up with diversity, and that when people decided that they could not, this was the cause of ethnic conflict and civil wars. He said that thinking that only 'foreigners' had culture was a clear outcome of basing everything on festivals, food and costumes, and giving the impression that 'culture' means 'ethnic' – old fashioned traditions.

Regarding the third space idea, Osama simply said that he was who he was and didn't want to be squeezed into a convenient place where he wasn't considered to belong to anyone in particular. Nada responded that she was increasingly getting the impression that people were finding it hard to belong anywhere. Osama retorted that this was because of the oppressive attitudes of the so-called 'home' people (she clearly thought this was a bit of a euphemism) and didn't mean at all that foreigners did not have the capacity to extend who they were into new places, if only they were allowed.

There are various views expressed in this narrative with regard to what I would term an essentialist version of *multiculturalism* and an essentialist version of the *third space* concept. Within the essentialist discourse, the concept of multiculturalism supports the view that we can best respect and understand 'other cultures' through the expression of the defining characteristics which make them different to each other, for example, through festivals, food and costumes. The international evening in the narrative is arguably an example of how this is often acted out in events that are set up for the learning about each other's large cultures through the sharing of cultural artefacts such as food, festivals, costumes and so on. Through education policy, essentialist multiculturalism has influenced the content of school textbooks that contain exaggerated and stereotypical images of people from 'other cultures'. It is therefore critiqued as supporting Othering through its emphasis on reductive and exotic characteristics which do not represent the full complexity and richness of people's cultural backgrounds⁷. The 'failure of multiculturalism' is often attributed to this essentialist version. Essentialist multiculturalism can be associated with an essentialist version of the third space concept, where people from different large cultures can come together and learn about each other in an intermediate space. It therefore implies an intermediate block between two large culture blocks⁸. There is also an association with an essentialist version of the notion of *hybridity*. This suggests that in the third space of intercultural interaction, cultural values cannot really be totally shared because of the uncrossable division between large cultures⁹. The

⁷ Critiques of essentialist multiculturalism can be found in a number of places (Cantle 2012; Delanty, Wodak & Jones 2008; Kumaravadivelu 2007: 104-106; Spears 1999), and with reference to representations in school textbooks in Hahl, Longfor, Neimi et al (2015). Kubota (2004, citing Derman-Sparks) presents 'liberal multiculturalism' as essentialist.

⁸ Kumaravadivelu (2007: 5) suggests that the third space concept implies a limiting space between two essentialist blocks.

⁹ Hybridity as an essentialist discoursal concept is noted by Fairclough (2006: 25).

danger of the essentialist version of these concepts is that they suggest uncrossable cultural boundaries that deny cultural travellers the possibility of belonging and being innovative within new cultural realities, instead making them segmented and in-between.

The following table summarises how the characters in the narrative each respond to these essentialist, multiculturalist and third space concepts as they are realised in the ‘international evening’.

Nada	Jahan	Osama	Theobald
<p><i>Subscribes</i> Doesn’t think there is anything wrong with people expressing examples of their cultures. Doesn’t think it has anything to do with ‘the West’ defining who they are. Thinks that the more important issue is how ‘home’ students are afraid to interact with them</p>	<p><i>Subscribes</i> Needs the opportunity to express his culture</p>	<p><i>Rejects</i> Thinks the international evening encourages exaggerated distortion of who people are and make them an exotic spectacle. Doesn’t need to be shoe-horned into an intermediate third space. The oppressive attitudes of ‘home’ students are no excuse</p>	<p><i>Ambivalent</i> Thinks that people put up with presenting exaggerated distortions of ‘their cultures’ because they have nowhere else to turn</p>

Nada once again finds mixed views. Her original interviewee, Jahan, provides the most secure support. Jahan and Nada’s subscription to the idea reflects how attractive such events can be, especially given how hard it is for so-called ‘international’ students to express who they are with so-called ‘home’ students. Both these terms have been contested as over-simplistic labelling that in themselves might contribute to Othering, perhaps of both sides. Nevertheless, they are felt labels. Jahan therefore welcomes a space in which he can express his particular image of ‘his culture’, and Nada does not see anything wrong with this despite the rejection and ambivalence from Osama and Theobald, even though he organised the organised the ‘international evening’.

One of the attractions of the essentialist versions of multiculturalism, third space and hybridity is that they run quite smoothly from the essentialist discourse; and this might subsequently explain why this discourse is also so popular and well-established. The firmness and apparent neutrality of the central idea that there are separate large cultures with their own distinct and describable features is solid and supportive. I wish to argue that the essentialist version of these concepts is therefore the most common within academic and popular talk, as I think is the case in the narrative.

Festivals and food

However, Osama’s relentless critique is very real. The following extracts are from the influential Black sociologist, Stuart Hall, speaking about his experience of moving from Jamaica to Britain, and about the implications for how we must look at culture:

People think of Jamaica as a simple society. In fact, it had the most complicated colour stratification system in the world ... Compared with that, the normal class

stratification [in Britain] is absolute child's play. But the word 'Black' was never uttered. (Hall 1991b: 53)

In that moment, the enemy was ethnicity ... 'multi-culturalism' ... 'the exotic' ... the exotica of difference. Nobody would talk of racism but they were perfectly prepared to have 'International Evenings', when we would all come and cook our native dishes, sing our native songs, and appear in our own native costume. ... I have been de-racinated for four hundred years. The last thing I am going to do is to dress up in some native Jamaican costume and appear in the spectacle of multi-culturalism. (55-56)

These two extracts are about the complexity of cultural experience and about how people (in Britain, but perhaps everywhere else too) choose to look at it. Some people have referred to the essentialist phenomenon represented here as 'boutique' multiculturalism, in which the foreign Other is simplified as an attractive commodity – hence the reference to exotic. Exoticising can be defined as seeing something as having a strange or bizarre allure, beauty, or quality.

Osama's anger about the third space discourse is also mirrored in this account by Kumara-vadivelu, an Indian academic living in the US, and connected with the essentialist notion of hybridity:

Proponents of cultural hybridity would expect me to create a – third culture, or a – third space, without allowing either my inherited Indian culture or my learned American culture to full determine my values and beliefs ... a state of ambivalence ... in-betweenness that is supposed to result when individuals ... displace themselves from one national/cultural context ... into another. I do not believe I am dangling in cultural limbo. (2007: 5)

Non-essentialist multiculturalism, third space and hybridity, and how hard they are to establish

There is however *non-essentialist, critical cosmopolitan discourse* version of these concepts. Here, multiculturalism supports an appreciation of the diversity of cultural realities within society, which are celebrated without recourse to large culture stereotypes¹⁰. The third space therefore becomes a far more creative space within which a genuine interculturality can be

¹⁰ Kubota (2004, citing Derman-Sparks) suggests a non-essentialist 'critical multiculturalism'. Cantle (2012) argues that multiculturalism simply describes the modern reality, and that its 'failure' relates to particular policies (53). He argues that 'progressive multiculturalism' avoids 'assimilationist' and 'separationist' tendencies (63). He cites the Canadian model that 'emphasises "cross-cultural understanding", "common attitudes", "a sense of belonging", being "open to and accepting of diverse cultures", "pride in ... ancestry" and "collaboration and identification with others"' (64).

worked out¹¹; and hybridity becomes present in all our identities and cultural realities¹². With regard to non-essentialist hybridity, Kumaravadivelu's statement above continues with a powerful clue to how this could be, within a non-essentialist multicultural rather than essentialist 'monocultural' frame:

Instead I believe I live in several cultural domains at the same time – jumping in and out of them, sometimes with ease and sometimes with unease. ... In fact one does not even have to cross one's national borders to experience cultural complexity. If we, as we must, go beyond the traditional approach to culture that narrowly associated cultural identity with national identity ... then we easily realise that that human communities are not monocultural cocoons but rather multicultural mosaics. (5)

However, because both essentialist and critical cosmopolitan discourses of culture can attach themselves to multiculturalism, third space and hybridity, it is often hard to see what people actually mean when they enact them. Someone who subscribes to the essentialist version, when hearing someone else speaking about these concepts, might easily imagine that they are sharing the same discourse, when in fact the other person may actually be speaking from within a critical cosmopolitan discourse. This is why, when talking or writing about these concepts in an academic domain, it is so important that we explain exactly what we are talking about. It also becomes clearer here how discourses of culture, and indeed discourses in general, are not tidy things with clear boundaries. They overlap, move, merge and split in different ways at different times, for different reasons. In the previous edition of this book, I chose to name multiculturalism and third space each as a separate discourse. Here I decided that this not the best way to talk about these concepts. As has been noted about grand narratives in Chapter 6, their splinters are picked up by people to populate and give substance to their personal cultural trajectories in all sorts of ways.

Reflection

Regarding food and festivals, it would be useful to interview recent and long-term newcomers to the country where we are, about how they feel about how their cultural backgrounds are represented in the society where they now live. Given how powerful the essentialist version of liberal multicultural might be, how might we encourage them to reveal deeper feelings? What sorts of questions would we ask?

¹¹ Homi Bhabha argues that the third space 'entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (1994: 5) can 'elude the politics of polarity and emerge as others out of selves.' (56) and avoids the 'fixity' of colonial discourse (94). Cuadrado-Fernandez (2015) argues that it implies different, non-essentialist meanings.

¹² Stuart Hall states that 'new identities of hybridity' are replacing 'national identities' for all of us (1996: 619), Homi Bhabha that it is the nature of culture per se (1994: 56), Delanty that it is the nature of the cosmopolitan (2006: 33), and Guilherme that it represents an 'upsurge of new forms of life' (2002: 128)..

Regarding hybridity, the essentialist version implies being mixed, or impure. It is important to try to find a way to move from this easier notion to a more difficult, complex non-essentialist version that relates to all of us. It is important, therefore, for us to be able to look at our own cultural identity and imagine how we can characterise it as being hybrid in a positive way, and to think how this then takes us away from the essentialist notion of a 'pure' or even 'virgin' culture.

Managing and undoing discourses

There is a reference to political correctness in the first part of the Nada, Jahan and Osama narrative, where Nada's tutor suggests that the students should not use the word 'culture' in their interviews. This is an attempt to undo the essentialist discourse by constructing new behaviour around a different use of language.

This strategy connects with the narrative about engineering conformity in Chapter 4, where, by introducing a new technical phrase which employees then use in meetings and reports, new behaviour is introduced. The implication here is that discourses are at least partially built around particular items of language. Indeed, where it is the case that a major tenet of the essentialist discourse is the notion of 'a culture' which has particular describable characteristics, not being able to use the term 'a culture' would force people to find other ways to express what they wish to talk about and perhaps lead them at least to talk less easily about cultural issues.

Such a strategy might not normally fall under the heading of political correctness unless it concerns undoing a prejudice. For supporters of the critical cosmopolitan discourse, the essentialist discourse *is* prejudicial due to the Othering which is considered to be at its heart. This would therefore be the thinking behind Nada's tutor enforcing the ban.

An example of the power of words can be seen in the following extract is taken from the end of Clare Danes text, which is referred to in the Alicia narrative in Chapter 6.

To research the role of CIA agent Mathison for *Homeland*, she also visited real agents in their workplace and asked them about the part that gender and sex play in their work: 'It can be an asset and used to their advantage, but it can also be problematic, and then they have to be creative about how to resolve that. It's a real issue in Arab cultures, where men don't have relationships with women like we do here'.

It can be argued that statement about 'Arab cultures' and 'relationships with women' is employing the essentialist discourse. If the word 'Arab' was not used I feel that it would not be so easy to make the essentialist statement.

Reflection

Regarding what might be called playing with words, it would be useful to collect examples of how particular nations, people or 'cultures' are described or referred to in the media and amongst people you know. What are the key words or phrases in the descriptions and references? What would be the effect of removing those words and phrases? What do people

need to do when they are not able to use certain words and phrases? Would this just restrict communication, or would it lead to discoveries of new ways to talk and then think about things that could actually develop understanding?

It cannot be ignored that the term ‘culture’ is commonly used by everyone everywhere. Most of the characters in the ethnographic narratives in this book talk easily about their and other peoples ‘cultures’, even when employing the critical cosmopolitan discourse. This needs thinking about. Would it really make any difference if any of the characters had to find other ways of talking about what they refer to as ‘culture’?

Further reference

In Stuarts Hall’s (1991a) article, ‘The local and the global: globalisation and ethnicity’, there is a discussion of the broad ideological and discoursal nature of ‘culture’. Delanty, Wodak and Jones’s (2008) edited collection, *Identity, belonging and migration*, provides a critique of the dominant Western discourses of culture and race. Fairclough’s (2006) book, *Language and globalisation*, deals with the conflicts between Centre and Periphery discourses of culture. Gerd Baumann, in his (1996) ethnography of the London Borough of Southall, *Contesting culture*, deals with the everyday constructions of diverse images of culture. Lankshear, Gee and colleagues, in their (1997) book, *Changing literacies*, provide an analysis of how we all travel through multiple discourses in everyday life. In my (2011) book, *Intercultural communication & ideology*, on pages 114-9, I deal with discourses of modernity, tradition and Westernisation; and on page 188, I present the notion of competing worlds of discourse for the first time. Zimmerman’s (2006) study of the letters home of American Peace Corp volunteers at the beginning of the 20th century, *Innocents abroad*, provides an excellent telling of the West as steward discourse.

My (2016) book chapter, ‘Cultural travel and cultural prejudice’, provides another discussion of the competing worlds of discourse. There are several references there to postcolonial fiction. There are a number of examples of fiction that provide excellent discussions of competing discourses of culture. While Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s (2007) novel, *Half of a yellow sun*, is about the Nigerian civil war in the late 1960s, it also a study of a Nigerian family who struggle to maintain a modernist discourse of culture in the face of an Othering colonial past. Laila Lalami’s (2015) novel, *The Moor’s account*, provides an example of the West as steward discourse in the way in which Spanish colonial authorities refuse to accept descriptions of civilised towns in pre-Columbian Texas because they do not provide the deficit model of the Other that they need as an excuse to colonise them.

Eva Hoffman’s (1998) book, *Lost in translation*, describes her experience of being a Polish person living in the United States struggling with language identity. A common interpretation of this book is that it represents what I would call an essentialist statement of third space and hybridity, in which she is unable to be herself within ‘American culture’. I contest this view, seeing it instead as an account of a non-essentialist experience of third space and hybridity in which she succeeds in transcending boundaries.

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